

Message Text

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SUBJ DELETION OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

REF OTTAWA 3769

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. BUFFALO STATIONS' APPLICATION TO JAM OWN SIGNALS GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN CANADIAN PRESS. DELETION/SUBSTITUTION POLICY ENDORSED BY GLOBE AND MAIL TV WRITER. CRTC ACTING CHAIRMAN BOYLE CLARIFIES POSITION REGARDING SUBSTITUTION OF US COMMERCIALS WITH CANADIAN COMMERCIALS. END SUMMARY.

2. APPLICATION BY BUFFALO TV STATIONS TO FCC FOR PERMISSION TO JAM THEIR OWN SIGNALS GIVEN MAJOR FRONT PAGE COVERAGE IN OCTOBER 18 TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL AND TORONTO STAR. ARTICLE QUOTES LOCAL CABLE OPERATORS AS INDICATING EFFECT OF PRACTICE IF APPROVED WOULD BE PRIMARILY TO DEPRIVE NON-CABLE VIEWERS OF THEIR PICTURE.

3. GLOBE AND MAIL ON OCTOBER 20 CONTAINED INTERPRETATIVE ARTICLE BY REGULAR TV WRITER BLAIK KIRBY SUPPORTING CRTC POLICY, A POSITION AT VARIANCE WITH PAPER'S SEPTEMBER 26 EDITORIAL (SEE OTTAWA 3649, PARA. 1). TEXT OF ARTICLE ENTITLED "BUFFALO BUDGE CRTC? UNLIKELY" FOLLOWS:

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BEGIN TEXT. SO THE BUFFALO STATIONS ARE APPLYING TO JAM THEIR OWN

SIGNALS GOING INTO TORONTO. THE BIG QUESTION IS, ARE THEY MERELY BLUFFING, TRYING TO RAISE A FUROR AMONG TORONTO VIEWERS? LET'S LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE. FOR YEARS NOW, THE BUFFALO STATIONS HAVE BEEN GROWING FAT ON THE \$10-MILLION A YEAR THAT THEY GET FROM ADVERTISERS IN TORONTO--AN AREA TO WHICH, WE SHOULD NOTE, THEY ARE NOT REALLY LICENCED TO BROADCAST. BUFFALO WANTS DESPERATELY TO KEEP THAT MONEY. THE CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION COMMISSION WANTS THE MONEY TO STAY IN CANADA, TO PROVIDE CANADIAN RATHER THAN U.S. PROGRAMS. IF THE CRTC CARRIES THROUGH ITS PROPOSAL TO ALLOW BUFFALO COMMERCIALS TO BE REMOVED FROM TORONTO CABLE-TV, THEN BUFFALO WILL LOSE MUCH IF NOT ALL OF THAT GRAVY. THE PROPOSAL TO CHANGE CANADIAN TAX LAWS WOULD ALSO TAKE AWAY SOME OF IT, THOUGH NOT NEARLY AS MUCH. SO WHAT BUFFALO IS REALLY AFTER IS NOT TO CENSOR ITS SIGNAL IN TORONTO, BUT TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE CRTC AND THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW BUFFALO AND OTHER U.S. BORDER STATIONS--PRINCIPALLY THE ONE ACROSS THE BORDER FROM VANCOUVER--TO CONTINUE SHOWING COMMERCIALS IN CANADA.

I MAY BE MISJUDGING THE TEMPER OF THE CRTC, BUT I DOUBT IF THERE IS ANY CHANCE THAT IT WILL CAVE IN. TO DO SO WOULD BE TO OBJECT A SURRENDER TO U.S. COMMERCIAL IMPERIALISM.

IF THE CRTC CAN'T BE BUDGED, WHAT DOES BUFFALO HAVE TO GAIN BY ITS CENSORSHIP PROPOSAL--EVEN SUPPOSING THAT THE U.S. FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION WOULD ALLOW IT? NOTHING, IN FACT, BUFFALO STANDS TO LOSE, BECAUSE THE JAMMING WOULD DEFINITELY AFFECT VIEWERS WHO SEE THE BUFFALO STATIONS BY USING AERIALS, AND THERE IS SOME QUESTION IT WOULD AFFECT THE CABLE-TV COMPANIES. SO BY JAMMING, BUFFALO ONLY REDUCES THE TORONTO AUDIENCE FOR ITS COMMERCIALS, AND THUS ITS TORONTO INCOME. BUT ISN'T IT UNFAIR AND IMMORAL, YOU MAY SAY, THAT THE CRTC PROPOSES TO STRIP THE COMMERCIALS FROM BUFFALO SHOWS, BUT LET US SEE THE SHOWS THEMSELVES? YES, IT IS. BUT SO IS THE COMPETITION AMONG THE BUFFALO STATIONS, WHICH DO NOT HAVE TO CARRY ANY CANADIAN PROGRAMS OR MAKE ANY CONTRIBUTION TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD FROM A CANADIAN VIEWPOINT. IN CANADA, THANK HEAVEN, TELEVISION IS NOT PURELY A MATTER OF FEEDING PROGRAMS TO THE LARGEST POSSIBLE AUDIENCE, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR QUALITY, IN ORDER TO MAKE THE LARGEST POSSIBLE PROFIT. TV HERE HAS THE DUTY TO GIVE US A BROADER VIEW OF LIFE THAN IS CONVEYED THROUGH A DIET OF SITCOMS AND CRIME SHOWS. SO, ON BALANCE, I HAVE TO AGREE WITH THE PROPOSAL TO STRIP OUT THE U.S. COMMERCIALS. I DO IT ONLY BECAUSE I FEAR THAT WE LACK THE GUTS TO DO WHAT

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REALLY OUGHT TO BE DONE: TAKE U.S. CHANNELS OFF CANADIAN CABLE ENTIRELY.

BUT JUST SUPPOSING BUFFALO DOES JAM ITS OWN SIGNALS, RATHER THAN MERELY THREATEN TO DO SO. WHAT WILL WE BE LOSING? MAINLY, ONLY THE CONVENIENCE OF HAVING TWO DIFFERENT TIMES AT WHICH TO WATCH U.S. NETWORK SHOWS-- ONCE ON A CANADIAN AND ONCE ON A U.S. CHANNEL. THAT, AND JOHNNY CARSON AND A BUNCH OF MOVIES. THE IMMORALITY OF STRIPPING OUT BUFFALO COMMERCIALS, BY THE WAY,

IS BEING BADLY EXAGGERATED IN SOME QUARTERS. THE CBC AND THIS PAPER BOTH SAID ON SATURDAY THAT THE PROPOSAL WAS TO SUBSTITUTE CANADIAN COMMERCIALS FOR THE BUFFALO ONES, AND THAT IS CERTAINLY NOT THE CASE. AT LEAST NOT NOW.

WHAT IS PROPOSED IS THE REMOVAL OF SOME OR ALL OF THE COMMERCIALS SHOWN ON THE BUFFALO STATIONS, AND THEIR REPLACEMENT WITH PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS--PLUGS FOR THE RED CROSS, OR THE UNITED APPEAL. TO USE COMMERCIALS SOLD BY, SAY, CFTO IN PLACE OF THE BUFFALO COMMERCIALS WOULD BE MUCH MORE OFFENSIVE. AND UNTIL STATIONS SUCH AS CITY AND THE GLOBAL NETWORK HAVE SOLD OUT ALL THEIR ADVERTISING TIME, IT WOULD DAMAGE THEM WHILE BENEFITING ONLY THE FAT CATS SUCH AS CFTO AND PERHAPS CHCH. END TEXT.

4. CANADIAN PRESS ITEM PUBLISHED GLOBE AND MAIL AND MONTREAL GAZETTE OCTOBER 20 QUOTES STATEMENT ON OCT. 18 BY HARRY BOYLE, ACTING CHAIRMAN OF CRTC, ANGRILY DENYING THAT COMMISSION HAS ORDERED CABLE SYSTEMS TO REPLACE US COMMERCIALS WITH CANADIAN COMMERCIALS. QUOTES BOYLE AS SAYING: "IT'S A DAMN LIE ... THE AMERICAN NETWORKS ARE PROMOTING THAT VIEW BUT IT'S NOT TRUE." HOWEVER, ARTICLE GOES ON TO INDICATE BOYLE ALSO SAID CRTC HAS NOT RULED OUT EVENTUAL SUBSTITUTION OF US COMMERCIALS WITH CANADIAN COMMERCIALS. CRTC WILL CONSIDER THIS QUESTION LATER THIS YEAR WHEN IT RECEIVES A REPORT ON THE COOPERATION ACHIEVED BETWEEN CABLE OPERATORS AND CANADIAN BROADCASTERS.

5. COMMENT: BOYLE STATEMENT IS TECHNICALLY CORRECT IN THAT THERE IS AT PRESENT NO DIRECT REPLACEMENT WITH CANADIAN COMMERCIALS. CRTC DIRECTIVES REQUIRE ONLY REPLACEMENT WITH "SUITABLE REPLACEMENT MATERIAL" WHICH MAY BE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS OR PICTURESQUE SCENES. HOWEVER, IT CERTAINLY HAS BEEN APPARENT FROM CRTC MATERIAL GOING BACK TO THE 1971 POLICY STATEMENT THAT AN EVENTUAL REPLACEMENT OF THE DELETED MATERIALS WITH CANADIAN COMMERCIALS WOULD BE REQUIRED BUT THESE WOULD NOT BE PRODUCED AND UNCLASSIFIED

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MARKETED BY THE CABLE COMPANIES FOR THEIR OWN PROFIT. RATHER, CRTC ENVISAGES A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CABLE COMPANIES AND LOCAL BROADCASTERS WHEREBY LATTER WHO WOULD PRODUCE, MARKET AND PROFIT FROM THE COMMERCIALS PERHAPS PAYING A FEE TO THE CABLE OPERATOR. THUS, ANY FUNDS REALIZED FROM THIS WOULD THEORETICALLY GO TO SUPPORT CANADIAN PROGRAM PRODUCTION, THE MAIN CONCERN OF THE CRTC IN PURSUIT OF ITS CULTURAL OBJECTIVES. THE STUMBLING BLOCK TO DATE HAS BEEN THE DIFFICULTY OF SECURING LOCAL AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CABLE OPERATORS AND LOCAL BROADCASTERS AS THERE ARE LEGAL CONCEPTS WHICH REQUIRE CLARIFICATION. WE UNDERSTAND SUCH AN AGREEMENT WAS REACHED IN EDMONTON EARLIER THIS YEAR WHICH WAS EXPECTED TO BE A MODEL FOR OTHER AREAS, BUT TO OUR KNOWLEDGE IT HAS NOT YET FULLY CAUGHT ON ELSEWHERE. REPORT ON COOPERATION EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR, TO WHICH BOYLE ALLUDED IN CP INTERVIEW, IS PRESUMABLY THAT REQUIRED IN RECENT TORONTO-HAMILTON DECISIONS

(SEE OTTAWA 3631).

6. CLIPPINGS BEING FORWARDED TO EUR/CAN, TD AND FCC.
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